

Halo Precision

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Summary: Two Spartans are better than one. With the Human-Covenant War nearing it's end, the role they play will be pivotal to the future of all the belligerents.

Halo Precision

****A/N: Another plot bunny which won't leave me alone.****

****So, this is just a "what if" kind of story where Kelly tags along with John. I'll be including elements from ****_**Halo: Reach**_**** and ****_**ODST**_**** as well as a few artistic licenses. Events will happen in near chronological order, but with another character, things will change.****

****XXxxXX****

"_There's nothing better than the tried and true€| or so we thought. We became complacent with tried and true, we never expanded beyond our horizon."_

_-Anonymous ONI Section III Weapons
Researcher**_**

****XXxxXX****

****GAMMA STATION****

****IN HIGH ORBIT OF REACH****

****AUGUST 30, 2552****

Linda crouched by the manual release, her forearm TACPAD pulsed as she interfaced with the console. The main outer doors of the pay eased open, revealing the endless black void and stars beyond.

"You're clear for exit, Chief. We're home free!"

"Contact left!" Kelly cried.

Too late.

The green bolt had caught Linda on her head. Wispy white smoke curled up from the smouldering hole in the helmet. John latched his fingers onto Linda's MJOLNIR Harness and dragged her across metal deck. Her biometrics was off, erratic and _unhelpful_.

Kelly spun on the axis of her heel and fired a long burst into a horde of Grunts, dancing back and forth on their feet. Ghostly green glows raced through the air and splashed harmlessly on the metal bulkheads. In the time it took a heart to beat, Kelly had already strafed along the hangar, sending shredder rounds down range.

The diminutive grey skinned aliens were struck dead centre, their torsos ripped into luminescent blue messes. Most dropped where they stood and drowned in their own pool of blood, others were knocked back by the powerful kinetic force and never moved again.

Kelly doubled back to John and Linda, covering her (oldest) longest friend and his dragged their best marksman to safety. She slapped a fresh magazine topped with armour piercing rounds and fired a long burst into a charging Zealot. The powerful reptilian bellowed in pain as the bullets tore through his chest and splintered his bones.

"We're losing Linda. Johnson, tighten up formation and get in that bird!" the Master Chief barked.

"Yes sir," the Sergeant complied.

He and his fellow Marines fell behind Kelly and manned the guns inside the dropship.

"Can you fly this ship?" John asked the Marine Sergeant.

"Yes sir," Avery Johnson replied.

"Take over," he then turned to face Kelly. "Cover fire. Keep them off of us."

The Spartan gave a nod and resumed her task. John dragged Linda onto the ramp and into the holding of the awaiting Pelican. As soon as everyone was on board, Kelly tossed a primed frag down range before retreating. A moment later, the dull thump and cries of pain echoed throughout the hangar.

Closing the main hatch, the engines flared and Johnson guided the craft out of the Station's bay and into the torrential storm of the abyss. Whatever was left of the Reach's Naval Forces were putting up any amount of fight they could against the Covenant juggernaut.

John and Kelly went to Linda, kneeling on either side of the wounded Spartan. They pulled off the melted sections of armour. Underneath in ragged patches, carbonised bone showed. John assessed Linda's vitals on his HUD. They were dangerously low.

"Did you do it?" she uttered in a weak voice. "Get the database?"

"Yes. We got it," Kelly said bitterly.

"Good," Linda smiled. "We won."

Clasping both their hands, Linda closed her eyes as her vitals flat-lined.

"Yes, we've won," John whispered, feeling her hand fall limp.

But they didn't win. Reach was lost. In the following hours, the Covenant laid waste to the UNSC's greatest fortress world. All able bodied Spartan-IIs were to fall back to the _Pillar of Autumn_.

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****ABOARD UNSC**_** HALCYON-**_**CLASS CRUISER **_**PILLAR OF AUTUMN**_**

****UNKNOWN LOCATION****

****SEPTEMBER 19, 2552****

He was floating in a place of tranquillity. It was a familiar dream, a pleasant one. He was back home, running around with a girl, a childhood friend. He remembered her â€" Parisa. He had promised to marry her. An older female voice called him by name â€" John. A moment passed and he felt arms wrap around him. He breathed in, he recognised that scent. The soft scent of soap. The woman said something nice to him. He wanted to say something back. But the words didn't come out as he wanted.

"_Ma'am, please proceed to the evacuation point."_

His voice was deeper than expected. Looking down at his arms, he realised they were encased in a greenish gauntlet, battered and caked in mud.

He looked at the woman again. But he was looking down, not up. He saw the features of her motherly face, straight nose, large warm eyes and full lips.

His sight wavered and the woman in front of him transformed in an eye blink. She had pale skin, dark hair, and piercing blue eyes which held a deeply rooted pain.

He knew her, Dr Catherine Halsey.

The dream changed again. A dark, nebulous shape loomed upon him, casting a shadow on the picture of the Mother/Halsey/Cortana image. His combat instincts kicked in as adrenaline coursed through his veins.

A cool sensation flooded his lungs as consciousness came running back. His eyes burned, forcing him to blink a few times before the dots disappeared.

"Steady yourself sir," a technician said.

His limbs tingled as flexed his stiff limbs. Sharp pinpricks rippled across his skin as he moved " freezer burn.

"Sorry we had to thaw you out so fast sir but Skipper wants you up and ready ASAP."

"Noted," John rasped.

Cryosleep had a tendency to make his vocal chords a bit rigid. Turning his head to the pod in the left, he saw Kelly easing herself forward.

"Sir, ma'am, please step out of the tube, we need to run some diagnostics."

The Chief's eyes scanned across the name tag on the crewman's fatigue; _Thom Shepherd_.

The two Spartans did as they were told. Stepping onto the metal deck, they pulled themselves up to their intimidating height. John saw an expression of awe flash across the technician's face for the briefest of moments before returning to neutral.

"Please follow me," Shepherd beckoned.

Walking through the bays of other empty tubes, John felt a slight pang of sadness as his chest tightened. These pods weren't supposed to be empty, they were supposed to have Spartans within them. His lips thinned into a grim line as his eyes fell upon the sight of Linda, limp and borderline dead.

There was a slim chance that she could be saved, it was so small that it was unquantifiable. But he and Kelly held onto the hope that they could find help for her, when the time was right.

"_Ma'am, sir,"_ another technician said over the intercom. _"You're biometrics are reading just fine. But we'll need to test the shields."_

"Okay," Thom began. "If you could please stand within the squares, we'll get you up to speed right away."

Standing where he was told, John pulled up readout of his suit's functionality and his own biometrics as well as Kelly. Everything was green across board, he wanted to get to the bridge, but following protocol had an uncanny way of calming high-strung nerves.

He heard the machine spool up as an aperture on a rotating pivot began to collect charge and spun around him. His vision soon filled with a golden light as he saw a blue bar pop-up on his HUD. The low pitched drone filled his ears as his shields recharged.

"Testing shields now."

A whip crack, followed by the high-pitched alarm and the flashing red bar, his shields were depleted. But a heartbeat later, the alarm faded and the bar refilled.

"Systems are green."

"_Bridge to Cryo Two, this is Captain Keyes. Send the Master Chief and Petty Officer to the bridge,"_ the PA system chimmed.

"But sir," Thom argued. "We need to test the weapon's calibrationâ€|"

"_On the double crewman!"_

"Aye, aye sir."

Thom sighed and turned to face the two Spartans.

"Alright, Skipper is getting jumpy. Better get you to theâ€|"

A blast ripped through the observation room. Metal screeched and shattered. John's eyes locked on the source, it was the control room.

"_Oh god! They're trying to get in here!"_ the technician cried.

John could hear the fear in the man's voice. A ghostly glue bolt caught the technical officer by his shoulder, knocking him to the ground. He saw the man twitch, grabbing something out of his pocket before the Elite came in and finished the crewman off. The Elites may be honourable fighters, but they were barbaric in his mind. There was no such thing as a war crime in this conflict.

The Chief bristled. Covenant Forces were in close proximity. He needed to get the bridge.

"Sam! Oh god," Thom breathed. "Come on, we've gotta' get the hell outta' here!"

Thom broke into a sprint as he rushed for the exit. Slamming in the controls, the doors parted open immediately. Entering a small walkway, John eyed the door up ahead.

"I've gotâ€|"

A fiery hand latched around Thom. John and Kelly pushed past the mangled body and hurried forward to another hatch. There was another explosion, bringing down the piping beside him. His shields sparked as it took the brunt of the blast.

"John, this way!" Kelly cried.

"_Warning!"_ the ship AI, Cortana broadcasted. "_Covenant incursions on port decks three and nine. Alpha Team engage enemy boarders."_

Ducking under the pipes, the two entered the adjacent hallway and sprinted towards the hatch at the end, their footfalls hammered onto the metal deck. Lights flashed green and the doors parted.

"_Rarrgh!_"

The Elite's mandibles flared, barring its sharp teeth as he swung his weapon to bear. John quickly sidestepped, letting the plasma bolt sail harmlessly by. He rushed forward and wrapped his hands around the jaws as Kelly locked the armed hand. In one synchronous movement, the Elite's head was left at an awkward angle, and its armoured gauntlet bent with bones puncturing the flesh.

Picking up the plasma rifle, Kelly swept down the hall as John raised his leg, and hammered his boot through the skull. A sickeningly wet crunch rolled along the deck as blue blood seeped onto the floor.

"_Enemy boarding parties on starboard decks eight through ten. Echo Team to intercept Covenant forces."_

"Friendly contacts," Kelly gestured.

A few Marines came around the bend and secured the area in a rough formation. He could tell that some had been on duty, while others had rushed out of the billets with barely enough time to put on their armour.

"Sir! The Captain needs you on the bridge ASAP!" the lead Marine said with an Australian accent. "You better follow me."

He then gestured to his fellow soldiers. "The rest of you hold this corner."

"_Covenant boarding craft detected on port decks four, five, seven, eight and eleven. All available combat teams, respond!_"

Dubbo " his tag said " led the two Spartans through the corridors and stopped by another barricade.

Another battle was being waged by UNSC Forces and Covenant boarding parties. Blue bolts sailed through the air, splashing against the walls and showering the deck with molten metal. The _Pillar of Autumn_'s crew fired their standard issue pistols, sending exploding rounds downrange. Marines joined the fight, strafing the walkway with rifle fire.

"_Baker Team reports Covenant Forces_"

"Grenade!" A Marine screamed

A ball of fiery sapphire licked hungrily at those caught within its wake whilst tossing others like ragdolls.

"Shit!" Dubbo muttered.

Leaning out of cover, Kelly fired a short burst. The bolt caught a Grunt in the face, burning off its head completely and detonating the methane tank. Though not enough to kill, the force of the explosion did knock its comrades over and left them vulnerable to Dubbo's MA5B fire.

The small beings shook violently under a hail of accurate fire, letting their luminous blue blood flow onto the metal grating.

"Shit, more hostiles inbound!" a Marine cried.

"_Warning! Covenant boarders on starboard decks for and six. Sierra Team reports heavy resistance! Security teams to assist."_

John quick rolled into the opening and snatched up an assault rifle. He checked the ammo counter, found a target and squeezed the trigger. The rifle chattered in short bursts as he aimed for the Elite's central mass and walked up.

Combined fire quickly neutralised the Elite Minor's shields, and tore its chest apart.

"Looks like we're clear, Chiefs," Dubbos gestured. "Come on."

Entering the armoury bay by the bridge, John could see the dried crimson on the floor and the men and women who lay still. Most of them had worn full combat gear, but UNSC armour barely stood against the onslaught of a technologically superior foe.

Some of the soldiers had their limbs blown off by needler rounds fired at them in a torrential volley. The plates in the BDU could deflect the rounds, as seen in the tears of the webbing and the scratches on the plates, but the projectiles usually found the separation in the armour where the flesh was exposed.

Other men and women had been struck down by plasma fire, the charcoal splash evident on their drabs.

Swinging around the corner ahead, Dubbo gestured them into the Command Bridge before returning to the fight. John walked through the rows of consoles and around the Battle Map. He found Keyes standing in front of a large glass display, looking at an array of information, with a hand carved tobacco pipe in hand.

He turned his attention from the display, made eye contact with the Chief and offered a hand. Instinctively, John took it, and despite the Captain's _human_ status, he felt the firm grip through his gauntlet.

"Good to see you, Master Chief," Keyes said as he held his hands behind his back. "Things aren't going well. Cortana did her best, but we never really had a chance."

A flash of purple and blue flickered on the nearby plinth. The shape took form of a nude woman in her early twenties, with algorithms scrolling along her body " Cortana's avatar.

"A dozen Covenant superior battleships against a single Halcyon_-class light cruiser. Given those odds I'm content to make that three" make that four kills," she said with a smirk and arms folded. Turning to face the two Spartans, she placed her hands on her hips. "Sleep well?"

"No thanks to your driving, yes," John answered.

The AI smiled. "So you did miss me."

The Chief felt the deck shake beneath him as a shock wave rippled through the bridge. He lurched forward before regaining his footing, and helped Keyes back up. Quickly, he looked over to Kelly, who gave him a small gesture to say that she was fine.

"Report!" the Captain barked.

"It must have been one of their boarding parties," Cortana said worriedly. "I'd guess an antimatter charge!"

"Ma'am!" the Fire Control Officer yelled. "Fire control to the main cannon is offline!"

"Captain, the cannon was my last offensive option," the AI frowned.

Keyes rubbed his chin and looked at the main display. There was a ring-shaped structure in orbit of a gas giant. The internal side and an environment similar to Earth, with large bodies of water and land mass spread out across the installation.

"Alright then," Keyes sighed. "I'm initiating Cole Protocol, Article-Two. We're abandoning the _Autumn_. That means you too Cortana."

The AI's stance shifted to frustration and annoyance.

"While you do what, go down with the ship?" she snapped.

"In a manner of speaking," the Captain said coolly. He pointed at the structure. "The object we found, I'm going to try and land the _Autumn_ on it."

Cortana shook her head, while the Spartans watched on.

"With all due respect, sir, this war already has _enough dead heroes_," she said.

"I appreciate your concern, Cortana, but it's not up to me," he said regrettably. "Protocol is clear. Destruction or capture of a shipboard AI is absolutely unacceptable, that means you're leaving the ship."

The Captain walked towards the main console and entered in a few commands.

"Lock in a selection of emergency landing zones, upload them to my neural lace, and sort yourself for a hard transfer," he ordered.

The AI's expression hardened. "Aye, aye, sir."

Her avatar winked from existence as Keyes focused his attention on the towering supersoldiers.

"Which is where you two come in," he began. "Get Cortana off this ship. Keep her safe from the enemy. If they capture her, they'll learn everything. Force deployment, weapons researchâ€¦" He paused as his brows furrowed. "â€¦ Earth."

"I understand," Chief said.

Cortana's avatar faded back into view.

"The _Autumn _will continue evasive manoeuvres until you initiate a landing sequence. Not that you'll listen, but I'd suggest letting my subroutines handle the final approach."

"Excellent work, Cortana," Keyes nodded. "Thank you. Are you ready?"

The AI looked around the ship with a forlorn gaze, and sighed.

"Yank me."

As Keyes hand hovered over the inserted data chip, Cortana faded from the plinth. Withdrawing the hardware containing the AI, the Captain took in a deep breath and placed the glowing data chip into the Chief's hands. The Spartan cradled it with infinite care as he slid it into the slot at the base of his helmet. His eye shot open as a cold mercury feeling flooding his mind. As the sensation dimmed, he blinked rapidly and drew in a deep breath.

"Hmmm," Cortana hummed. "Your neural pathways aren't that much different from the _Autumn_'s."

"Don't get any funny ideas," John retorted.

"Cosy enough for you?" Kelly asked, he could hear the smile in her voice.

"Very."

John kept his eyes on Keyes, whom shoved his wooden pipe back in his pocket.

"There's a weapons crate for you located on Deck Echo-Seven, it's on the landing above the cryo chambers and on the way to the pods. A gift from Halsey."

"I understand, sir."

Leaving the bridge, John took a turn around the hallway which led them to the mess halls. Two Marines lay dead by the door. Quickly, the two Spartans policed the sidearms, rifles and ammunition.

"Those Marines look like they could use some help," the AI chimmed. "Do what you do best, Spartans."

Instinctively, John strafed to the left and hugged the food servos. Spent shells arced through the air and clattered onto the deck, smoke curling up from them. The Elite minor in the centre of the room was caught by a full burst of armour piercing rounds, its shields overloaded and chest caved in.

Kelly moved to the right of the hall and kept low. Ghostly green and blue bolts splashed all around her, sending sparks to the floor. She ducked and rolled to an alcove, a burst of enemy fire narrowly missing her. Leaning out of cover, she fired the plasma rifle in quick succession. A trio of Grunts staggered and fell silent.

Moving up, the Spartans provided covering fire for more Marines to enter the hall. With the legendary Spartans on their side, the Marines fought with greater ferocity and smashed through boarding party. One unfortunate Elite entered the room, roaring its battle cry.

"Eat lead Covie bastard!" the Marines bellowed.

The men and women were only too happy to satisfy the reptilian's honour code of no retreat. An unrelenting fire storm reduce the Elite's upper body to a mangled mass, held together only by its shredded armour.

"One down!" a Sergeant barked. "Move in and secure the area."

With the cafeteria cleared, John and Kelly exited through to the main walkways. Two Elites waited for them at the end of the hall, along with a lance of Grunts. Kelly immediately opened fire, hurling plasma bolts at the closest Elite. John strafing left, caught two grunts with a trio of bullets in the chest.

Quickly, the two Spartans leapfrogged their way up the hall, engaging the Elites, darting back and forth. Two plasma bolts splashed onto John's shields, draining them down to two thirds, a third bolt splayed across the length of his rifle, reducing it to a molten mess.

Drawing his M6D sidearm, John brought the weapon to bear, zeroing in on the skull. He squeezed the trigger in quick succession and was rewarded with the sight of exploding bone and brain matter. The other alien had retreated behind cover. Sprinting towards the final Elite, John slammed his back into a crate and knocked the alien out of cover. Kelly vaulted by and emptied her last round.

The Elite roared in pain as its face blistered from the searing heat. John spun around from the corner and swung the red-hot melted rifle into the exposed flesh. He finished the alien off by bringing his armoured heel down, hammering the rifle like a nail.

"Messy," Cortana commented dryly. "How about using your secondaries."

"Poetic, and saves ammo," Kelly shrugged.

Entering a corridor, John saw two friendlies appear on his motion tracker.

"Chief overâ€¦"

The deck lurched from beneath him as a thunderous roar echoed throughout the ship.

"What the hell?" a Marine cried frantically. "Did something just hit us?"

John caught the second Marine's eyes. He could see fear in the man's eyes as he saw his impending death.

"Move it!" he barked. "Back to theâ€¦"

A fiery sapphire flame swept in from the airlock, tossing the two Marines into the bulkhead. Seeing the bloody smears on the wall and the cracked armour, John knew they were dead before they had hit the floor.

"Hostiles inbound," Cortana warned. "I've detected two Elites and five grunts coming in."

Bringing his sidearm up to bear, a trio of rounds leapt from the barrel and struck an Elite Major in the face. The alien's shields flared as it blocked the explosive rounds, but a fourth round caught the reptilian dead centre. With enhanced eyes, John caught the outline of the Elite's mandibles, seconds before it was permanently torn apart. The Major fell, its head a mangled mess.

"I got the other one," Kelly said, strafing left.

John heard her rifle crackle and hiss as it spat out bolts of intense energy. Wispy tendrils danced along the length of her weapon and target as ionised air flowed back and forth. The Minor staggered against the forceful blows against its chest, molten armour raining down onto the metal decks. It gave the Spartan one last defiant look, before a round tore through its heart.

Without their leaders, the Grunts panicked and ran. John knew that these diminutive aliens were cannon fodder; their cowardice made them easy prey. But he knew how they could easily overwhelm a careless Marine.

Aiming down his pistol sides, he picked off the Grunts in quick succession. Bodies were dropped as huge chunks of flesh were torn, spraying blue all over the white tiles.

Advancing, he picked up an MA5B from mangled hands and checked it for any damages. Satisfied with its working condition, he polished any ammunition and tucked them into the pouches on his support webbing.

"Ammo status?" he asked.

"Sixty," Kelly answered, referring to the Plasma Rifle's remaining cells.

She attached the Covenant weapon to her thigh magnets and took the other rifle.

"Good to go."

The Spartan's continued on down the hall at a pace that would push normal humans to their limits. But to the superhumans, it was just a brisk jog. They moved along the walls, scanning every crevice and alcove, making sure that there were no stowaways to hit them in the back.

Rounding a corner, John scanned the area and saw an atrium at the end of the hallway. A squad of Marines were fighting with Covenant soldiers on the upper landing. Bolts of green and blue sailed through the air, while forks of gold and ember struck back. Upon entering the open area, John sprayed a trio of bullets at the mezzanine. The explosive rounds sent sparks flying and the Grunts sprawling for

cover.

With precious time brought, Kelly quickly pushed off the deck and slammed her boots onto the midsection of the staircase. Using her momentum, she sprung onto the upper level. In arm's reach was a Grunt, her fingers latched around the diminutive alien's throat and crushed its windpipe. Spinning to bear on an Elite, she hurled the Grunt with all the force she could muster and was rewarded with the sound of a sickening crunch.

The Elite staggered under the impact. Two rounds from her pistol were all it took to overload the shields and send the reptilian over the ledge. A split-second later, she heard a concentrated burst and a blood curling death cry.

John linked up with her again, and the two continued following the signs to the cryobay, and beyond; the escape pods.

Resistance along the way was sparse as the Marines slowly regained control. The Covenant was pulling back, no longer sending in reinforcements.

The two Spartans reached a sealed off bulkhead. John swore inwardly as he realised that they may have to double back and take a longer route.

"Cortana, options?"

"Maintenance routes, marking on your HUD now."

An orange blip appeared, with a meter distance counter, The Chief followed the markings and looped around the a billet area, before reaching the gated access route.

"Hold on, I'm granting you access now."

The pulsing lights winked green, and quietly the gate parted open. Automatically as John entered, the _MJOLNIR's_ enhanced visual systems cleaned up the feed. It was considered a step up from night vision goggles, which had a habit of leaving the user vulnerable to flashbangs. Surface edges were highlighted while the faces of the walls and decks were lightly highlighted in their respective colours.

The Spartan kept an eye on his motion sensor, the occasional red dot catching his attention. Someone else was in the passageway. It couldn't be an Elite, those reptilians were far too big. It had to be the Grunts.

Keeping low and quiet within the dark grey shafts, he could hear the laboured breathing of the _methane suckers_. He made a few hand gestures to Kelly, signalling for the Spartan to move up and stay close.

John quickly moved down to the end of the tunnel and rounded a corner, his eyes quickly zeroed in on two Grunt. Before the small aliens could even squeak, he had his armoured hands shot out wrapped around their mask, his fingers digging into their faces. With one fell motion, he brought the two skulls to a shattering explosion of blood and gore.

"Nice," Kelly said dryly. "Good to know you're not above crushing things beneath you."

"It's efficient."

"And messy," Cortana added.

Continuing up the tunnel, John made a left turn, and arrived at another gate. John placed his hand on the control panel and entered the 'open' command. The grate slid open, allowing the two Spartans to step back into the brightly lit hallways of the ship.

The Chief scanned the corridor, his sights settling on a burnt mangled body of a Marine. Straining his ears, he heard the light scuffle of Grunt hooves on the ceramic tiles.

'_Possible hostiles,'_ he signed to Kelly.

Quietly, the two moved along the walls, conscious of how much noise was made with every step. Peering around the corner, John's eyes laid upon the sight of a dozen Grunts and an Elite clad in black armour.

Special Operations, the Chief recalled.

He had run into a few of those warriors a few times. They were far more cautious than their regular brethren. He also knew that the Grunts following the large reptilian would not be so easily intimidated.

'_Cover and fire,'_ John gestured.

Though they could use their secure COM channels, the EM emission could give them away â€" unlikely, though he'd rather not risk it.

Readying the rifle, John leaned out of cover and exploded into a fury of motions. The MA5B roared as it unleashed a torrential storm of armour piercing rounds. Scores of Grunts shook violently, the bullets having torn through their breathing apparatus. He let them drown in the oxygen environment, and focused his attention on those who had managed to scamper to safety.

But just as the Chief had pulled the trigger, his partner was already on the move. Kelly strafed across the corridor, ghostly blue bolts splashing against the bulkheads, showering the deck with sparks. A trio of shots scored hits on the Special Operations Elite, centre mass. Its shields didn't go down, but it was more than enough to force the alien back.

John knew exactly how dangerous the Spec Ops Elite was; they had active camouflage. As long as he kept the fire up, the Elite couldn't advance without its cover being blown. He waved for Kelly to advance as he fired another burst down range.

Emerald bolts stabbed back at him, slamming against his shields. The alarm droned again in his helmet far too soon, forcing him behind cover. Stray rounds streaked past him and melted away the opposing bulkhead. These Grunts were trained to fight effectively in a

formation; they weren't used as cannon fodder.

"Got you clear!" Kelly roared, blasting away at a nearby Grunt.

The Chief loaded a fresh clip into the rifle, with a satisfying click. He left cover, firing quick bursts. AP rounds bounced off the energy barricades that had been erected by the boarding parties, the bullets embedding themselves inside the panelling.

Throwing himself behind a toppled crate, he made a quick check on his former position, just in case he was flanked.

"Where's the Spec Ops?" John asked.

"He's â€¦."

Sapphire lances stabbed through the air and splashed across metal barricade, showering John with molten metal.

"â€¦ there."

Switching to his pistol, John fired four rounds in quick succession at the Grunts. Two of the bullets struck the methane tank, hurling the small creatures across the corridor.

Kelly finished off the last Grunt by melting away the metal covering an alcove. The metal glowed white hot as its surface warped and revealed a mangled corpse behind it.

Moving forward, Chief was struck by a plasma round. Whispy blue tendrils hazed his line of sight.

"Keep your head down," Cortana chided. "There are two of us in here now."

Ignoring the AI's remarks, John clicked his COM and switched back to his rifle.

"Kelly, we'll rush him on my mark."

The Elite strafed across the hall, firing unnervingly accurate shots.

"Mark!" John roared.

Leaping from cover, the two Spartans charged down the corridor, their heavy footfalls crushing the dead Grunts. John focused fire on the Elite's right arm. The concentrated cluster tore through the plasma rifle, rendering the Elite defenceless.

Kelly zeroed in on the chest cavity, depleting the last of the battery cell. The Elite's shields overloaded and winked out of existence. Closing in, she swung her right arm with all her might. The searing hot plasma rifle smashed through the reptilian's lower jaw with tremendous force.

John was a few feet behind her when he heard the sickening crunch, and saw the fountain of indigo. Moving up, he saw that the helmet had been peeled back, and was covered with pulverised bone and gore.

"And you said Chief was the messy one," Cortana said nonchalantly.

"No one's perfect," Kelly countered.

The two Spartans made their way past another corridor of mangled bodies where they took a moment to police new weapons and ammunition.

"Cryo observation should just be up that ramp," John gestured.

Making their way up the ramp, they took a right turn towards the armoury. Upon reaching the doors, John entered his ID command. The metal slab retracted back into the walls with a soft hiss, allowing passage.

"There's the crate," Kelly said, pointing towards a high security box in the centre of the room.

Convenient, John pondered with slight mirth.

"Let's make this quick," Cortana urged.

Kelly placed a gloved hand on the identification console. The screen pulsed as it sent a series of challenge ID algorithms to the MJOLNIR, a few seconds later, the panel winked green. Locks were disengaged, popping the crate open.

Taking a look at the contents, she gave a low whistle. Within padded harnesses were two Fulton & Rasch Asynchronous Linear-Induction Battle Rifle-57s (or MagCoil-57 or M57 Gauss Rifle). ONI Section III had contracted Fulton & Rasch Industries to develop their prototype Gauss Rifle for Spartan use.

John had only read about it through messages from Fhajad. The weapon looked like a cross between the conventional front loaded and the bullpup. Ammunition magazine was inserted into a receiver on the stock, and the hydrogen fuel cell was located in a receiver in front of the trigger.

Angled and vertical foregrip-pod came as standard alongside with other specialised hardware, in the one package. No expense spared in the creation and production of the MagCoil-57.

A part of the Chief was already itching to test out the rifle. Attaching the ammo pouches and frag grenades onto their armour's support webbing, the two Spartan left the armoury and made their way to the escape pods.

Making a left turn, John sprinted down the ramp with Kelly in tow. He entered a glass observation room. In the corner was a dead technician. He was the one named, Sam. The man's chest and right shoulder was burned to a smouldering mass, and in his left hand, he clutched a photo of a woman.

"Looks like they were hoping to get to you in a hurry," Cortana murmured, referring to two Elites in the cryochamber below.

"Let's test these guns," John said.

Kelly nodded.

To the Spartans' relief, the weapon controls were similar to the MA5 Series, ambidextrous and self-explanatory. Flicking the safeties off and switching to dual burst, the two zeroed in on an Elite each.

"Mark!"

A chorus of thunder echoed throughout the room as the glass shattered. The super-dense rounds quickly overwhelmed the shields, and reduced the reptilians' chest into a mass of pulverised bone and innards, dangling from warped armour plates.

"Effective," Kelly commented.

Leaving the observation room, John led his companion down a flight of stairs and into another corridor. He made a sweep, and checked the corners, everything was clear. They made a sprint down to the end of the hallway, and vaulted over a pile of over turned crates.

John could hear the explosion of firing engines as the escape pods left the ship. He felt the tremor of shockwaves as Covenant boarding parties forced their way onto the _Halcyon_-class cruiser.

"They're shooting our pods. We go out and they come in," Cortana hissed. "Clever bastards."

"We've got contacts," Kelly warned.

The two fanned out, covering both sides of the escape pod launch bays. Spheres of violet rippled across the hold, scorching the tiles and flinging debris in all direction. John's visors engaged full polarisation to protect his eyes from the intensity.

He didn't bother taking cover; he needed to wait for the perfect moment. Switching to full-auto, he waited for the Covenant to leave their vessels.

Another dozen Grunts scampered onto the deck, the heels of their foot singing by the searing hot floor. The Elites didn't care about their charge; instead they had been consumed with their bravado that they had boarded the _Autumn_ first without checking.

It didn't matter though.

"Let the idiots bunch up," he keyed to Kelly.

"Copy."

The Elite Major growled something in his native tongue. A split second later the translation software whispered in John's ear.

"_Hurry, the Demons are on this ship._"

"Execute!"

Squeezing the trigger, the rifle didn't even kick as it roared a cacophony of thunderous hell on the Covenant. The air was filled with a metal storm, ripping apart anything it touched. The rounds turned Grunt's into seared chunky smears on the floor, and the Elites into nothing more than torn ragdolls, hurled across the bay.

The sheer force and velocity of the rounds imparted enough kinetic energy to create a devastating shock wave that would rip flesh apart, and toss whatever was left like a discarded bag. The bulkheads at the other end of the corridor fared no better. As the rounds struck the metal surface, sparks were sent flying as chunks of the slabs were chipped.

As devastating as the MagCoil-57 was, and despite how small the rounds were, John knew that there was an extremely limited amount available to them. Kelly seemed to be having similar thoughts as she attached the rifle onto the magnetic clamps on her back, and tightened the rifle's sling.

Switching back to MA5Bs obtained in the armoury, the two began the final leg to the remaining lifepods.

The bay was being contested in a fierce firefight between a contingent of Marines and a lance of Covenant troops. Placing a hand on the metal barricade, John leapt over the dividers and entered the Marines' ranks.

"Cavalry has arrived, boys," a Corporal cried in relief.

The Spartan moved to the other end, where Grunts were pouring through in the droves. Priming a grenade, John tossed the frag down into the midst of the soldiers. None of them noticed the olive-grey orb, bouncing along the white ceramic tiles. None of them noticed until it was too late.

The grenade detonated in a cloud of smoke and shrapnel as an invisible hand swept aside the horde in a single strike. An Elite Major had been unlikely enough to have been in the kill radius, its limp body crashing into the wall with a sickening thud.

"We're clear, get on board the pod. Move it!" John barked.

The contingent turned back to the remained pods and made a mad dash for the entrance. One of the ceiling conduits exploded, throwing a Marine to the ground.

"Oh god no! No!" he cried.

John quickly scooped up the fallen soldier, and tossed him into the hold. The Spartans made one last sweep of the hall before entering the pod.

"Now would be a very good time to leave!" Cortana urged.

John clambered up to the cockpit.

"Punch it."

"Aye, aye, sir!" the woman complied, with a distinct Southern American accent.

Hatched sealed, and rockets ignited. The lifepod accelerated with such force out of the airlock, John had to grab onto a handrail to support himself.

"We're disengaged," the pilot said. "Goin' for minimum safe distance."

The bumblebee soared out into the blackness of space, leaving the _Autumn_ to her fate.

"We're going to make it, aren't we sir?" a Marine asked.

John turned to the man in the harness beside him. The young jarhead was no older than twenty five, and looked at him with imploring eyes. The Spartan placed an arm on the Marine's shoulder, patting him lightly.

Seeing an expression of relief flooding the young man's face, the Chief turned his sights back to the lifeboat's destination.

"Look," Cortana said.

"What is that thing, Lieutenant?" another Marine asked.

"Hell if I know," the pilot answered. 'But we're landin' on it."

"Oh shit, the Autumn, she's been hit!" a Marine cried.

Turning around, John dashed to the rear of the lifeboat. Kelly stepped aside and made some room for him. Plasma torpedoes streaked from the Covenant Battleships, and struck the _Autumn_, boiling away the titanium armour. Seeing the speed at which the sparks were flung out into space, John could tell that the ship's hull had been compromised.

"I knew it!" Cortana said. "The _Autumn_'s accelerating, Keyes is going in manually."

More sapphire bolts slammed the Halcyon-class cruiser's hull, turning the alloy white hot.

"Heads up everywhere, this is it!" the pilot said, her fingers dancing across the console. "We're entering the ring's atmosphere in five."

"Sure you two wouldn't rather take a seat?" the AI asked.

"We'll be fine," John answered.

Grabbing the support rungs at either side of the lifeboat, the two Spartans took a bracing crouch stance.

"If I still had fingers, they'd be crossedâ€|"

The lifepod's viewports began to polarise as the vessel was immersed in flame, rocking and shuddering violently.

Here we go againâ€|

****XXxxxXX****

"_To hell and backâ€| but I don't think there's a 'going back' this time."_

**-ONI Combat Tactics Analysis**_

****XXxxxXX****

****A/N:** This has been something I've been working on for quite some time, and I've just been incrementing piece by piece of the story.**

****I'll be skipping a few missions, simply to get to the good part.****

****The MagCoil-57, I got inspiration from the M99 Stanchion Gauss Rifle and the CHEMRAIL in **_**Elysium**_**.****

****â€|****

****Many thanks to Carleen for beta work.****

...

****So please leave a review and tell me what you think.****

End
file.